DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 953 FL 013 043

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TITLE Initial and Further Training of Teachers.
INSTITUTION Council for Cultural Cooperation, Strasbourg (France).
REPORT NO CC-GP4-(81)-33
PUB DATE 18 Dec 81
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the conference "Across the Threshold towards Multilingual Europe--Vivre le Multilinguisme Europeen" (Strasbourg, France, February 23-26, 1982). For related documents, see FL 013 041-046.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Communicative Competence (Languages); Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; International Educational Exchange; *Language Teachers; *Second Language Instruction; *Teacher Education; Teacher Effectiveness; Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS Europe (West)

ABSTRACT

The role of the language teacher is changing and teacher training must be adapted to orient teachers toward facilitating language learning for communication. The working group held in connection with the Modern Languages Project of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Cooperation summarized the main objectives in all teacher training for communication, the insights and basic knowledge a teacher should have, and the curricular and teaching skills needed. Generally, the objectives are competence in the target language; the ability to assess syllabi educationally, culturally, and linguistically; and the readiness to try out and apply a number of classroom tactics. Underlying all the above is the ability to facilitate learning rather than to impose activities on learners. The same working group also dealt with forms of teacher training, both preservice and inservice. Emphasis would be placed on opportunities to acquire communication skills in the target language and, for teachers already in service, job-oriented activities geared to teachers' actual classroom needs, especially in adult and migrant education. The Council for Cultural Cooperation, through its scholarship and bursary system, has enabled teachers to attend inservice courses in countries other than their own. New projects will build on this groundwork. (AMH)

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L' EUROPE

Strasbourg 18 December 1981 CC-GP4 (81) 33

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

CONFERENCE

"ACROSS THE THRESHOLD TOWARDS MULTILINGUAL EUROPE -
VIVRE LE MULTILINGUISME EUROPEEN"

(Strasbourg 23-26 February 1982)

INITIAL AND FURTHER TRAINING OF TEACHERS

by

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Initial and further training of teachers

1. The changing role of the teacher

When I was trained as a language teacher in the 1960s, after a lengthy and highly academic study at the university covering philology and literature of the English language, I was told to draw an imaginary line between the class and myself which I was never to cross: instead I was to remain facing the pupils who were sitting at their desks in pairs in three long rows at this particular German "Gymnasium" or grammar school. One of my trainers even recommended that a teacher should stand in one front corner of the room opposite the window with the sunlight reflecting off his glasses so that the pupils could not see his eyes and predict his moves. Unfortunately I do not wear glasses.

A lot of teacher training all over the world still seems to reflect the learning and teaching philosophies which developed alongside authoritarian and hierarchy-oriented social systems of the pre-democratic age. There is a strong belief that the teacher is the centre of all teaching and learning activities in the classroom. He or she appears to know everything and the students are seen as empty vessels to be filled with what is presented. In foreign language teaching it is the teacher who knows - the students do not, how could they? Thus the teacher is often seen as the bearer and the ambassador of the other language and culture.

Yet, as we all know, when we learn foreign languages, no matter whether in school or in evening classes or as a migrant child or adult, we draw heavily on what we have already learnt, and indeed, all second language learning relies on our own experience and knowledge of the world and also on the way we have acquired our mother tongue and our knowledge and mastery of communication skills in it.

Language learning for communication needs a teacher who is aware of this and who is capable of linking the foreign language classroom activities with the lives and learning potentials of his or her students and their cultures.

Given this basic fact, it is obvious that teachers who teach young people require different skills from those who teach adults a foreign language, or who teach a second language to migrant children or adults who must use the other language in their everyday lives.

However, there seems to be a common core of teacher attitudes, knowledge and skills for all three purposes.

Indeed, the basic teaching qualification is one best described as a particular attitude which the teacher has with regard to his or her role in the school and in the classroom. Language teaching for communication requires a teacher who regards herself or himself as a facilitator, an adviser and a counsellor rather than as an instructor and an assessor.

This attitude is a basic educational qualification and will best be achieved if the teacher is aware of the fact that she or he as a non-native speaker of the foreign language is in principle in the same position as the learner, and that differences between herself or himself and the learner are relative. Likewise, the native speaker teacher teaching a migrant child or adult must be aware that it is only through experience that the learner will actually learn how to use the target language.

2. Objectives, needs and purposes

In the working group held during the meeting of the leaders of pilot schemes in the school sector of the Modern Languages Project last June, it was my task to summarise what we thought were the main objectives in all teacher training for communication:

> "It is in the nature of the communicative approach to foreign language teaching that the teachers should be effective and pedagogically-oriented communicators themselves. It is therefore of the greatest importance that the foreign language teacher should be able to use the target language in a communicative way, ie in such a way that she or he is able to initiate communicative situations in the classroom, assist the learners in finding their own learning goals and methods and ... to encourage understanding and the use of the foreign language - even though comprehension is difficult and uttering/using the language a problem".

Let me be quite clear about this. It would not suffice if teacher training were only to produce more or less perfect speakers of the target language. Its task is rather to create an attitude where teachers are "ready to accept that communication is free interaction between people of all abilities, opinions, races and socio-cultural backgrounds and that foreign language communication, especially, is there for international understanding, human rights, democratic development and individual enrichment", as I have put it in my contribution to the Report on the Modern Languages Project. And, "the very nature of free communication demands an attitude of respect for the learner, his or her needs, and a readiness to regard teaching as enabling learners to develop their talents in a self-directed way both as members of groups and individuals".

Language learning for communication in Europe then is a matter of everybody's rights and not a privilege of an elite, and the European language teaching force, through this attitude, can make a considerable contribution towards its realisation.

It is obvious, of course, that attitude alone does not do the teaching. A lot of knowledge and skills are required, too.

The first insights the teachers should acquire are those into the nature of learning, the learners themselves and their environment and conditioning, both their mother tongue and the target language and the socio-cultural connotations. These are particularly crucial with migrant learners. And since very few teachers have been trained in this so far in initial teacher training this is a field to develop and exploit in in-service teacher training organisation.

In the group report mentioned before we have also listed basic knowledge in the fields of applied linguistics, educational psychology, sociology, pedagogy and the science of communication. In fact, one might make a long list of items and areas of knowledge which a good language teacher should master.

Yet knowing about things does not necessarily produce teaching competence. Indeed, it is the curricular and methodological skills that the classroom performance and educational strategies of the teacher depend upon.

The curricular skills comprise the ability to assess syllabuses and language courses educationally, culturally and linguistically and to make decisions on the use of texts, to process texts in the different media for teaching purposes and to evaluate orientation frames or guidelines for their didactic potential as well as to devise and employ differentiated and branching exercises leading the student to carry out communicative tasks in the foreign language.

Teaching and classroom skills embrace the readiness and ability to try out and apply a variety of classroom tactics, grouping practices, methods and different uses of media in order to make the teaching/learning process successful both for the individual student and the learning group.

The overall skill, however, linking attitudes and knowledge, is the ability to administer "learner-centredness, the idea of needs, the role of assessment, self-directed learning, the relations between language as tool of communication and language as system, the concept of learning strategy, the concept of functional teaching, the idea that all mistakes are logical", as Louis Porcher says.

Communication skills on the part of the teacher should enable her or him to "share meanings, experiences and affects" (Breen/Candlin) rather than be limited to the knowledge and handling of the formal system of the other language alone.

In summarising let me say that the communicative approach to language learning which the modern languages project has so substantially promoted in the last decade requires, on the part of the teacher, a set of democratic and learner-oriented attitudes, professional knowledge and skills and communicative competence in his own and/or the target languages.

It would be wrong and misleading, however, if we were to demand all these qualifications of teachers in Europe in a dogmatic or idealistic way. Indeed, all of these qualifications will be part of a life-long learning process of professional adult learners linking their initial learning with everyday experience and experimentation. Materials and methodology "have never been considered to be a closed and perfect system of the management of teaching but have always been part of the experimentation itself. The overall skill, then, to be achieved by way of trial and error and constant participation in experimentation is that of handling innovation, not a set of recipe rules" (from my contribution to the Modern Languages Report).

It is necessary that the teaching of foreign languages to school pupils and to adults, and the teaching of second languages to migrant children and adults be seen together in this respect. Learner-centredness may mean something different for the adult migrant from what it means for the native child and, of course, taking the socio-cultural backgrounds into consideration will mean something different for both groups, yet the general attitude and approach will indeed be very much the same. The notion behind this is that language is an instrument for meaningful activities and that the learner must have a chance to identify with what he is learning to say and write. A child will react differently from an adult and her or his knowledge and experience will be different from those of an adult; a

migrant worker learning the language of the country in which he currently lives will obviously have a different background and learning attitude from those of adult learners in a particular country who are learning English by following a course using Follow Me in order to get round with English on their next holidays abroad.

However, the teachers of all the different kinds of learner must use the same basic approach in assisting the learners to answer the two fundamental questions in language learning: "What does this mean?" and "How can I say (or write) what I would like to say (or write)?" Didactic skill then is the ability to find out and take into consideration how this individual or group can understand and what the conditions are for using the target language.

A great deal has been said so far about objectives and purposes of teacher training. But what about the needs of teachers, personally felt needs? If needs orientation is the key issue for serving language learners well, surely the same principle will have to be applied to their teachers' learning processes.

It is difficult to generalise on personally felt needs of language teachers in Europe. Looking carefully at the reports on the intensive visits to pilot projects in the school sector by Rune Bergentoft and also recollecting situations of personal encounter during some of the visits which I had the privilege to be engaged in, these needs can be seen to lie often in different areas. In some countries in Europe, including my own, language classes are far too big and students and teachers are suffering from this. Many seem to feel that language teaching does not receive the amount of attention it ought to receive from the authorities. Many complain about the lack of materials and media and some of them are aware they are not too well qualified but cannot do anything about it. And there appears also to be a good number of language teachers who find themselves badly informed about current trends; and some of them are clearly hostile to the constantly changing trends and theories. "This is the way we have done it in this country for a long time, and we do not see any reason why we should change."

It would be totally against the principles of the modern languages project if personally felt needs of this kind were pushed aside. Indeed, it has been the policy of the project to offer expert analysis, orientation and contacts and encourage decentralised development based on the needs, objective and personally-felt, of those involved. This is why there is not and cannot be a master plan for teacher training.

3. Forms of teacher training

In the group report mentioned above we have tried to define stages and kinds of teacher training (cf document CDCC (81) 35, section 4.3). Therefore I can be brief here.

In basic teacher education, when it is conducted by universities, there is frequently little or no connection with school or teaching practice. In our report we have noted: "While the general task of the universities, namely to conduct research and introduce the students to academic disciplines and study skills, is not questioned, it is felt that courses for future teachers should contain a practical element. Indeed, the teacher-to-be should be introduced to the relationship between theory and practice as early as possible so that she or he may acquire the attitudes, the knowledge and the tools to view her or his work professionally and apply scientific methods".

As far as we can see there is little to report on basic teacher education for teaching migrants. However, in many countries the need for this has been recognised and first steps have been taken. It seems essential for future work to gather information on university courses at European level and to promote the exchange of experience and assessments.

In some countries there exists a distinct phase of pre-service (post-graduate) teacher training, either voluntary or compulsory. It seeks to familiarise graduates from the universities or other tertiary institutions with teaching practice and the theory of school. Where there is no basic teacher education pre-service training also involves teaching the subject.

With regard to the communicative approach to language teaching the role of the teacher trainer would be one of an adviser who is capable of making "assessment part of the communicative process".

In basic and pre-service teacher training great emphasis should be placed on opportunities to acquire communication skills in the target language. In many countries it is obligatory for a language student to spend some time abroad. From the point of view of the Modern Languages Project, authorities and teacher training institutions should be encouraged to increase exchanges and study visits in order to establish living links with the countries of the target languages which may serve as support for the teacher in his future professional life.

Likewise, it is essential for teachers of migrant children and adults to study the languages and cultures of their learners at the training stage however limited this will remain. Again this is an area of future European project work.

In our definition of In-Service Teacher Education and Training (INSET) or Further Training we stress the fact that while pre-service training is dealing with the preparation of teachers-to-be, INSET "includes all kinds of job-oriented learning activities for teachers in service. It is part of the teacher's work and may be organised individually, privately or collectively making use of a variety of ways and means, eg individual study, books, media, correspondence materials, informal and formal groups and courses at local, regional, central or national and international levels. It seems to be most effective when it is geared to the needs of teachers and actual classroom activities."

"If a learner-centred approach is to be followed in the classroom in which the learner is encouraged to become responsible for his own learning, then a teacher-centred approach is required in INSET, and teachers should be encouraged to take more responsibility for all aspects of the teaching/learning process."

It is, of course, impossible to make any prescriptions as to how countries should organise their specific methods of INSET. One can, however, point to a number of very promising features and results which we found in the intensive visits of pilot projects in the school sector.

First of all there seems to be a great potential of in-service training motivation on the part of the teachers. Often they have organised their own grassroots training schemes with the assistance of some helpful agency. They are producing or adapting materials and developing syllabuses and teaching schemes alongside. In some countries the authorities offer a complete network of institutions and experts for an integrated process of curriculum design, classroom experimentation and in-service organisation.

In the schools and adults sectors a joint effort was made to prepare a compendium on teacher training programmes and institutions, mostly at INSET level. From the individual studies and the consolidated report by Professor Krumm it becomes quite clear that there are numerous examples and a wealth of experience which should be disseminated and exploited in the new modern languages project.

In order to ensure classroom representation, efforts have been made to gather video and film documents of "good" teaching. When we were assessing some of these documents in a meeting here at Strasbourg last year we found that the exchange of video or film presentations is a necessary step - yet it is only part of a more comprehensive enterprise which is basically governed by face-to-face interaction and communication between co-operating teachers.

From the experience gained so far it can be gathered that INSET is especially needed in the adult and migrants sectors because there is so little basic or pre-service training for these fields.

Indeed, many of the teachers teaching adult classes were trained to be school teachers initially or do both kinds of language teaching side by side. As we all know, the teaching of adults requires special knowledge and methodology which should be taught systematically and not only acquired, if at all, by trial and error.

4. Work done and work in progress

Teacher training activities have attracted the interest of the Modern Languages Project for a long time. After the initial period of systems development work it soon became clear that dissemination and implementation would largely involve teacher information and training. For the Modern Languages Report I have summarised the work as follows: "Since the Council of Europe does not organise teacher training courses directly, the greatest importance attaches to the work of national agencies, institutions, associations and other organisations, at government/state and private level in the dissemination, use and further development of the ideas and proposals of the Modern Languages Project

The group of experts and affiliated institutions have helped to make the work of the Project known beyond the level of paper information throughout Europe, and indeed overseas. Since 1978-79 the flow of feedback has constantly increased and, obviously, had some impact on the on-going project work itself. The interaction network described elsewhere is linking experimental syllabus and materials design efforts and teacher training experience on a larger scale".

In the meantime many teacher training courses have been held all over Europe, not only in the schools sector but also in the adults field. In the Volkshochschule system an international model of training multiplicators has been developed. The CDCC bursary scheme has enabled many teachers and multiplicators to attend INSET courses in other countries. The interaction network in the schools sector has produced numerous international contacts and professional links. It is true to say that all the efforts were particularly successful because of the opportunities of personal links and direct communication.

In the new project we will have to build on this groundwork and expand and widen our mutual relations. The pool of teacher training programmes and models of organisation has already been mentioned. There is also some experience on bi-national or international teachers courses and week-end seminars, namely between Denmark and Germany and the Netherlands and Germany, which can be exploited. The work of the cultural institutions like the British Council, the Instituts Français or the Goethe Institutes has been a great help in bi-national teacher training efforts. Indeed, if teaching and learning languages for communication is to be fully realised all teacher training measures will have to have a strong international bias.